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# The Big Shift: How VCU Libraries Moved 1.5 Million Volumes to Prepare for the Construction of a New Library

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## Abstract

Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries (VCUL) has been faced with serious space problems for more than a decade. Initiatives to correct this include the digital shift. VCUL's new policy stipulates that journal subscriptions should be electronic only, wherever available. Where publishers offer both print and online for the same price, the library donates the print instead of keeping them on the shelves. Replacing print series with the electronic version as they become available is another ongoing practice. Added to these is moving infrequently used or superseded materials to storage as a continuous activity. All these were short-lived measures until now. In the spring 2014, VCUL began the construction of a new library and the renovation of the old one on its Monroe Park Campus. When completed, it will have 63,000 square feet of renovated space and 93,000 square feet of new space. Both old and new will be 263 square feet. The new facility will alleviate overcrowding and add much needed study and collaborative spaces. The new space will have 25 new group study rooms, a 65-seat quiet reading room, a 110-seat graduate and faculty research center, an innovative media center, an expanded café, and a 300-seat public auditorium. Ninety percent of the new space will be for students. In order for the renovation to begin, it was necessary to release the space currently housing part of the collection. This involved moving, shifting, weeding, and deaccessioning a large number of materials in the collection. This paper describes the repurposing of space, reshelving, storing, and withdrawing approximately 1.5 million volumes, a process we call "The Big Shift." This is a major endeavor, one that will have an impact on Cabell Library for a long time to come. In the words of John Duke our Senior Associate University Librarian, "Virtually every book and media piece in the library will have to be touched, along with hundreds of thousands of bibliographic records" (Duke, 2013).

## Introduction

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is one of the nation's top research universities. It enrolls more than 31,000 students on two Richmond campuses—the Monroe Park Campus and Medical College of Virginia (MCV) campus. The VCU Medical Center including the university's health sciences schools, offers state-of-the-art care in more than 200 specialty areas and serves as the region's only Level I Trauma Center. Situated in the heart of Richmond the capital of Virginia, VCU serves an integral role in the economic health of the city—educating the current and future workforce, reaching out to the community, advancing research and enhancing patient care since 1838. VCU also has campuses in Northern Virginia, in Doha, Qatar, and in Charles City County, Virginia. VCU Libraries (VCUL), one of Virginia's outstanding research library systems,

advances the university's teaching, research, service, and patient care mission with holdings exceeding 2.3 million volumes, 61,000 serials, 600,000 e-books and nationally prominent collections in the health and biological sciences, social work, the arts, the history of medicine, and comic book arts.

## Literature Review

In order to put in perspective what VCUL is trying to achieve, it is important to understand the changes in structure and function of academic libraries through the ages. There has been a shift in the information-seeking behavior of students, faculty, and researchers. Contrast with the past, is rightly put by Freeman:

"Unlike the medieval libraries, early academic libraries were both centers of learning and important gathering places for scholars. As a

'temple of scholarship', the library as place assumed an almost sanctified role, reflected both in its architecture and in its siting."

"Originally, academic libraries in the United States started as places to collect, access, and preserve print collections. Admission and use were a privilege, the interiors were dim, some books were locked down with chains, it was difficult to move around, and specialized services were only available to the very serious scholar. Collections were the main focus of these primarily static buildings. Given this long practice, it is no surprise the traditional library cannot serve today's needs. To meet today's academic needs as well as those of the future, the library must reflect the values, mission, and goals of the institution of which it is a part, while also accommodating myriad space needs to embody new pedagogies, including collaborative and interactive learning modalities. Significantly, the library must serve as the principal building on campus where one can truly experience and benefit from the centrality of an institution's intellectual community." (Freeman, 2005)

Freeman goes on to say:

"The library which is still a combination of the past (print collection) and the present (new information technologies), must be viewed with new perspective and understanding if it is to fulfill its potential in adding value to the advancement of the institution's academic mission and in moving with that institution into the future. With the emergence and integration of information technology, many predicted that the library would become obsolete. Contrary to that, usage has expanded dramatically, sometimes doubling or even tripling. Students at all levels of academic proficiency need and want to go to the library more than ever before. Going to the library adds value to their lives and offers many of the tools and experiences that will give them the competitive edge they will need to succeed after their formal education is completed. There is an expectation that the library is the place to be; it is where the action

is. The faculty expect their students to use their time in the library thinking analytically, rather than simply searching for information. Faculty also see the library as an extension of the classroom, as a place in which students engage in a collaborative learning process, a place where they will it is hoped, develop or refine critical thinking." (Freeman, 2005)

One of the goals of this project is to provide the kind of space specified by Freeman, one that will help students to be creative to become innovators. In the age of interdisciplinary subjects, students need collaborative spaces to discover and create new knowledge.

According to Brown, Bennett, Henson, and Valk, (2014), learning spaces are directly connected, and that in many cases, the new services and programs in learning spaces have resulted in significant changes to library collections. In an Association of Research Libraries (ARL) survey, approximately 89% of survey respondents stated their collection was moved within the library as a result of learning space development. In the same survey, 71% reported their collection was moved to an off-site facility as a result of changes in learning spaces, 86% weeded their collection, and 57% were influenced to make transition from print to electronic resources (Brown, Bennett, Henson, and Valk, 2014).

Seeking more information about similar projects, we found that the literature features current renovations and construction of new library buildings, but each one is unique in its own way as tailored to the specific needs, goals, and aspirations of the parent institution. Kent State University, for instance, moved 600,000 books, about half the total collection to remote storage, in order to free four floors. Two of these floors became the home of the journal collection that was moved from the second floor to construct a 16,000 square foot Math Emporium. One floor houses the Emporium and the last floor is a new lounge study area for students. In what they called the smart pull, the 600,000 books represented those with low use and publication date before 1990, and those with very low use and publication date between 1990 and 2000.

On another note, North Carolina State University (NCSU) opened its brand new library, the focal point on the Centennial campus, in January 2013. The goal was to provide a place for different constituents to interact, collaborate, and innovate. In an unprecedented operation, part of their collection was moved into an automated book delivery system called bookBot. The bookBot can hold up to two million volumes and it serves as the primary storage facility. The bookBot, contains older and low use materials, the majority of which were transferred from the off-site storage facility.

In the case of VCUL, the need to renovate and construct a new library at this time cannot be overemphasized. The next section articulates the problem.

## The Problem

VCUL over the years has been creative in dealing with inadequate space. James Branch Cabell Library surpassed its capacity several years ago, and optimum user space is lacking. The reason for this space shortage is in the history of Cabell. The first phase of Cabell, built in 1970, consisted of two floors, the basement and ground floor, both of which held 138,945, with a total capacity of 225,000 volumes. It was to grow at a rate of 25,000 volumes per year. Five years later, three additional floors were added for a total potential capacity of 750,000 volumes. If it continued to add 25,000 volumes per year, it would reach full capacity in 30 years. However, between 1975 and 2010, Cabell more than doubled that number. Between 1995 and 2009 alone, we added more than 813,000 volumes. VCUL converted user spaces to book stacks on a regular basis to accommodate the growth. Today, the collection stands at 2.3 million, and the level of overcrowding cannot be overstated.

As the collection grew so did the VCU community. According to the 1970-1971 *University Bulletin*, there were 672 full time faculty and 280 adjunct faculty. According to the same source, there were 12,350 undergraduate students that year (8,750 full time, 4,600 part time), and 800 graduate students. In another publication, the September 10, 1970 issue of the student paper,

*Commonwealth Times*, there were 1,616 students on the MCV campus. Enrollment increased by 144% between 1970 and 2012; and faculty grew by 300%.

Over the years, library patrons visiting the physical space have increased exponentially. In 2004, one million people visited the libraries. That number doubled to two million in ten years, as our collection keeps growing steadily.

Something had to be done, even if only temporarily, to relieve the crowded nature of the stacks. This was achieved in a number of ways. In 2002 and 2004, VCU Libraries purchased 17,289 linear feet of compact shelving which were installed on the basement floor of the building. This houses the collections that included journals dated prior to 2000, electronically replicated titles, particularly JSTOR titles, out of scope titles, and duplicates. With in-house storage, came the policy that all infrequently used materials be relocated to storage as an ongoing activity to release space for newer, more frequently used materials and for more comfortable user space. Also included, were titles considered by selectors to be candidates for storage using system generated lists. Criteria used were:

- Circulation over time.
- Age.
- Condition.
- Outdated subject matter.

Added to this were low-use nonbook materials of enduring value to the VCU community. The goals were to relieve overflowing in the stacks, reduce the frustration of our patrons and increase the usability of the collections.

This approach worked for the collection temporarily, but there was still a dire need to increase user space. In the LibQUAL results for 2008, users expressed their dissatisfaction with the inadequate study and collaborative spaces in Cabell. This prompted the university to acquire an offsite storage facility in 2009, repurposing part of a former grocery store. In 2010, the office of the Provost and VCU Libraries decided to construct a new Learning Commons on the second floor of

Cabell. The Commons would provide 18,000 square feet of study and work space for users.

In order to understand the shifting and moving, it is necessary to give the original layout of the library.

- 1st floor—reference collection and government documents, current periodicals, newspapers.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> floor—formerly bound journal collection (now the Learning Commons).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> floor—class number A-M, microfiche and microfilm collections, oversize collection, and Media Services.
- 4<sup>th</sup> floor—class number N-Z, Juvenile Literature, oversize collection, and Special Collections.

The decision to construct the Learning Commons on the second floor set in motion the monumental task of moving all the bound journals out of the second floor. In an effort to keep bound journals in the building, materials previously stored in the compact shelving on the basement floor, mostly electronically replicated abstracts and indexes and superseded reference sets, were moved to an offsite storage facility recently acquired by the university. Subsequently, part of the bound journal collection was moved to the basement. JSTOR journals were moved to offsite storage facility. Those with significant print characteristics or without electronic version were moved to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, next to the current periodicals.

The new Learning Commons (LC) has 18,000 square feet of academic and collaborative workspace and a 1,100 square foot multipurpose room for instruction and more. This room can be reconfigured for different needs. The new LC also has seven new group study rooms with white boards, computer, large monitors, and other support for collaborative work, 438 new seats, 83 PCs, and 12 Macintosh computers, 18 mobile whiteboards, 20 new laptops to expand the already popular laptop loan program, electrical outlets throughout the facility for laptops and other mobile devices, ubiquitous, high speed wireless network access, and print stations for both color and black and white printing.

With the opening of the LC in the fall of 2010, Cabell became a very popular sanctuary on campus. Typical gate count in the fall is 10,000 per day. After the Learning Commons opened, gate count exceeded 15,000 per day for 17 days in one month, an increase of 50% over the typical gate count. Where there were 47 visits per patron per year eleven years ago, that number increased to 72 visits per patron per year in 2010-2011. This phenomenon of if you build it, they will come, is confirmed by ARL 2014 survey that found that 75% of responding libraries experienced an increase in gate counts and 35% experienced an increase in web traffic related to learning spaces, (Brown, Bennett, Henson, and Valk, 2014). The construction of the Learning Commons marked the end of one of our major initiatives. The project provided much-needed relief for some of our perennial space problems, but was it enough?

The LibQUAL results for 2011 showed significant satisfaction among users. However, it took just a couple of years before users started feeling the effect of overcrowding again. The survey results in 2013 show the overarching dissatisfaction with the space and accompanying infrastructure, such as electrical outlets and adequate number of seats. By 2013, in order to meet VCUL's aspiration and projected service goals for the next 20 years and beyond, it was imperative to build an addition to Cabell and renovate the old space. The announcement that the state had allocated funds for the construction of a new library could not have come at a more opportune time.

After the announcement and the architects released their drawings showing the size of the space to be renovated, work started in earnest. The first step was to review the collection in storage and make a decision about what to keep and what to withdraw from the collection to make room for materials to be moved out of Cabell stacks. For an easy workflow, collection management librarians marked the spine of the books to be withdrawn with a black line. Those withdrawn included duplicates, superseded editions, abstracts and indexes that have electronic versions, and out of scope titles. Staff members in the preservation department then took the books off the shelves and scanned their

barcodes into Excel spreadsheet files. With a large number of materials to deaccession, it was easier and quicker to use a batch approach. Catalogers used these Excel files to generate and withdraw large sets of item records in ALMA (Ex Libris). This collection review released some space in both the in-house compact storage and the off-site storage. This space will eventually house the materials that will be moved out of Cabell stacks. Estimates showed that in order to create the space necessary for the renovation, as specified by the architects, it would be necessary to move approximately 200,000 volumes out of Cabell. When we realized this, we invested in high capacity compact shelving which brought the total capacity of our off-site storage close to 500,000 volumes. In order to install these shelves in the same space, we had to first move all the books on the current storage shelves into a holding place with the help of Richmond Commercial Services, and the shelves dismantled. During this period, we had to restrict access to the collection and update the item records to have the location of "Not available." After the installation of the high capacity storage shelves, the books were returned and the item records changed again. The next step was the review of the general collection. This was done in phases.

## **First Floor**

### *Reference Collection*

Starting from the first floor, it became imperative to reduce the size of our very large reference collection. Specifically, the collection has to be reduced significantly. We achieved this by integrating some essential reference tools with the circulating collection and deaccessioning outdated ones and electronically duplicated ones. For easy workflow, the subject specialists and liaison librarians devised a color scheme, whereby yellow stood for transfer to stacks and red stood for withdraw. During this period, we had to restrict access to the collection and update the item records to have the location of "Not available." All relocations entailed relabeling the spines and changing circulation policies.

### *Government Documents*

Similarly, on the first floor, it is essential to reduce the government documents collection. VCU Libraries had been a 50-60% depository library for federal documents, therefore it had a relatively large collection. There were 5,640 linear feet of government documents. This needed to be reduced significantly. To accomplish this task, two processes ran simultaneously. One process was to remove those that were neither relevant to our mission nor our curriculum, 17,421 items total. These were deaccessioned and considered withdrawn from the collection. The second process was more involved. Working with the head of the Regional Center, we identified the superseded titles and deaccessioned those as well. The remaining in this category, were offered to other institutions according to the depository agreement, keeping to the depository regulation, of offering and waiting 45 days total. At the end of 45 days, if no institution requested them it would be safe to withdraw from the collection. 37, 695 items fit into this category.

In summary, 5,640 linear feet of shelving has been cut to 3,153.5 linear feet, a reduction of the space occupied by government documents by about 44%. The five remaining rows of shelving are, predicted to be stable, since there is minimal acquisition of physical government documents. This is a significant space saving towards our renovation. The government document reduction and realignment took one staff working 30 hours a week and three students working about 30 hours total a week for about three months. During the peak months of this project, a cataloging staff member also spent about 25-50% of her time processing the thousands of withdrawals. Since VCU is one of ASERL Centers of Excellence with a robust Master's program in Homeland Security, a 100% depository for Homeland Security documents (HS1) was the only collecting area retained at that level. The weeding of superseded documents will continue as needed, to ensure that the collection maintains relevance to curriculum needs. The space thus saved makes room for study spaces and construction of offices.

Still on the first floor, five rows of shelving housing current journals, bound journals, and foreign

newspapers were taken down to make room for the temporary entrance, security post, and some study space. With space gained from weeding government documents and the reference collection, there was room to move part of the circulating collection to the first floor.

### Third floor

#### *Nonbook materials*

There were over three million microforms, occupying 2,000 square feet of floor space. We decided to retain those holding the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*, or 35 cabinets in all. We consolidated others that have relatively moderate use into the compact upright storage cabinet and moved the remaining to our off-site storage facility. The third floor also held other nonbook collections such as CDs, DVDs, computer files, 16 mm films, vinyl recordings, and music scores. A review showed it was best to reduce the size of this collection significantly by deaccessioning obsolete formats, CDs accompanying outdated books, superseded software, old computer files, and items no longer relevant to VCU's curriculum. We ended up removing about 500 computer files and another 500 multimedia items from the collection. The remaining items were more manageable to review. Some lesser used ones were moved to storage, while we integrated CDs that come with monographs into the circulating collection alongside the parent monograph. We also re-shelved music scores, formerly in a separate location, with the rest of the general collection. Depending on the program requirements in the departments of music and film, we will still keep and protect some 16mm films and vinyl recordings.

#### *Collection A-F*

Previously, collection classes A-F resided on the third floor. With the shifting and renovation, they were relocated to the first floor. By removing this collection and a significant number of microforms, we claimed the space for the construction of administrative offices.

### Fourth Floor

Previously, collection N-Z resided on the fourth floor. With the space gained on the third floor by moving A-F, we were able to move collection N to the third floor, while P-Z remain on the fourth floor.

### Oversize Collection

A review of the oversize collection on both the third floor and fourth floor resulted in deaccessioning and storing part of the collection. As a result, we could consolidate both collections into one that now resides on the fourth floor.

### The Shifting

With all the physical weeding completed, it is time for the shifting. First we shifted the bound journals to the space relinquished by the reference collection and part of government documents.

In the next phase, we moved the collection in Library of Congress classification A-E from the third to the first floor, while F-N moved to the third floor, followed by shifting and rearrangement of the shelves. The rest of the collection, P-Z, remains on the fourth floor. With class N moving out of the fourth floor, it was time to consolidate the space, shift the books, and remove the shelving to release the space that will become part of the Special Collections Department. Moving collections around could result in user confusion and frustration. There was a conscious effort to minimize this. Changing signage promptly was a priority.

### Conclusion

Our endeavor to create functional spaces for today's learning patterns started in the late 1990s. This project is a significant phase, the one that satisfies today's needs and will prepare us for the future. We have repurposed our old space in such a way that our collections can be meaningful. Essentially, we touched over one million items. Not only did we move books physically to storage we also have to change their records. Books to withdraw had to be deaccessioned and the system

updated. Work is not completed on the renovation, and work is still going on with the construction of the new building, but the part that involves the collection is over. The current configuration as far as collection goes is as seen in Table 1 below. Moving our construction forward involved about 90 staff, helpers, and volunteers in four major departments who, since last October,

reviewed, touched, moved, shelved, stored, or withdrew 1.4 million volumes, with minimal disruption or inconvenience to users, a phenomenon we call "The Big Shift." Our community cannot wait to see the old and the new when it is all finished in the fall of 2015. It will give learning, teaching, and research on the Monroe Park campus a whole new meaning.

First Floor	Old	New
Collaborative Study and Computing	Reference Collection Government Documents Collection Information Services Group Study rooms Print Stations Self-service checkout Starbucks	Collaborative Study and Computing Bound Journals Collections A-E Reference Collection Government Documents Collection Information Services Group Study Rooms Print Stations, Photocopiers, and Digital Sender Self-service checkout Starbucks CD/DVD Collection Reserves
Second Floor	Bound Journals Photocopy station	Learning Commons, Collaborative Study and Computing Group Study rooms Print Stations, Photocopier and Digital Sender
Third Floor	Collections A-M, CD/DVD Collection Music Scores Microforms Media Center Reserves	Quiet Study Collections F-N Innovative Media Microforms Group Study Rooms
Fourth Floor	Quiet Study Collections N-Z Oversize Books N-Z Special Collections and Archives	Quiet Study Collections P-Z All Oversize Books Art Browser Graduate/Faculty Study Room (will close in 2015 due to the construction) Special Collections and Archives Expanded

**Table 1.**

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